

**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Bureau of Land Management
Burns District Office
Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area
Finding of No Significant Impact
Wildland Juniper Management Area Interpretive Trail
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-OR-B060-2009-0078-EA**

INTRODUCTION

The Andrews/Steens Resource Area staff, Burns District, has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze the construction of the Wildland Juniper Management Area (WJMA) Interpretive Trail. The Proposed Action would take place in the WJMA located approximate 72 miles south of Burns, Oregon, on the North Steens Road on Steens Mountain. The 3,267-acre WJMA was designated in the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act of 2000 (Steens Act) for purposes of experimentation, education, interpretation, and demonstration of active and passive management intended to restore the historic fire regime and native vegetation communities on Steens Mountain.

The panels and brochures would meet the following goals and objectives from the 2005:

*Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area, Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan, 2005 - pg. 29,
Wildland Juniper Management Area: Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area, Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan, 2005 - pg. 29.*

Goals - Manage the WJMA for the purposes of experimentation, education, interpretation, and demonstration of active and passive management intended to restore the historic fire regime and pre-settlement native vegetation communities on Steens Mountain, compatibly with preservation of desirable juniper woodland ecological values in nonexperimental areas.

Objectives - Establish a series of demonstration areas within the 3,267-acre WJMA for technology transfer and public education. Evaluate different treatments and management strategies for plant communities dominated by western juniper.

SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

In order to meet the education and interpretation elements expressed in the Steens Act, the Bureau of Land Management proposes a short network of interpretive trails including two to six informative panels and markers coinciding with a brochure and extension of existing pullouts. The trails would allow visitors a close view of juniper experimental treatments and their success in restoring native vegetation.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to context and intensity of impacts, is described below:

Context

The Proposed Action would occur in WJMA, along North Steens Road and would have local impacts on affected interests, lands, and resources similar to and within the scope of those described and considered in the 2005 Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (CMPA PRMP/FEIS). There would be no substantial broad societal or regional impacts not previously considered in the 2004 Steens Mountain CMPA PRMP/FEIS. The actions described represent anticipated program adjustments complying with the 2005 Steens Mountain CMPA RMP/Record of Decision (ROD), and implementing recreation management programs within the scope and context of this document.

Intensity

The CEQ's ten considerations for evaluating intensity (severity of effect):

1. The EA considered potential beneficial and adverse effects. Project Design Features were incorporated to reduce impacts. None of the effects are beyond the range of effects analyzed in the Steens Mountain CMPA PRMP/FEIS, to which the EA is tiered.

Soils, Vegetation, Noxious Weeds, and Biological Soil Crusts: While impacts are anticipated to the soil and vegetation, primarily on the trail corridor and adjacent areas, this impact would generally heal through natural processes. Introduction of new weed species is possible and specific design elements would be followed such as washing of equipment prior to entering the project area. Monitoring for noxious weeds would be performed annually and weeds treated as needed.

Soils, vegetation, and biological soil crusts would be altered along the trail route during construction and continued as the trail is used and maintained. However, by keeping people primarily on the interpretive trail, impacts would be minimized. While some people may leave the designated trail for short periods, it is expected soils would generally heal through natural processes from year to year.

Migratory Birds and Wildlife: Migratory birds and wildlife could be affected as people travel on the trails; however, overall populations in the area would not be affected. Construction of the trail would have no effect on migratory birds if the work was completed after July 15 which would be after fledging of young birds. There would be no effect to the mule deer population.

Cultural Resources: Cultural resources would be affected by bringing visitors into the area with the potential for artifact removal and disturbance. While the archaeological sites inventoried in 2009 are in the general area of the proposed trail, the trail does not cross any of the sites. Utilizing the trail design features, such as anti-looting signs to reinforce the notion that artifacts and site should remain intact in order to preserve their data potential but also to provide interest to the WJMA visitor. Yearly monitoring of the site for artifacts would occur by District staff.

All other resources would not be affected by the Proposed Action or alternatives.

2. *Degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health and safety:* No aspect of the Proposed Action or alternatives would have an effect on public health and safety.
3. *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.* Unique characteristics for the WJMA include the only designated juniper management area in the country. The 3,267-acre WJMA was designated in the Steens Act for purposes of experimentation, education, interpretation, and demonstration of active and passive management intended to restore the historic fire regime and native vegetation communities on Steens Mountain [Sec. 501 (b)]. Cultural resources have been found in the vicinity and will be mitigated with the project design features and annual monitoring.
4. *The degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:* No unique or appreciable scientific controversy has been identified regarding the effects of the Proposed Action or alternatives.
5. *Degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:* The analysis has not shown there would be any unique or unknown risks to the human environment nor were any identified in the Andrews Management Unit (AMU)/CMPA PRMP/FEIS to which this proposal is tiered.
6. *Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration:* This project neither establishes a precedent nor represents a decision in principle about future actions. This interpretive trail is unique in nature because it occurs in the only designated juniper management area in the country. However, the area was designed for experimentation, education, interpretation and demonstration of active and passive juniper management.
7. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.* The environmental analysis did not reveal any cumulative effects beyond those already analyzed in the AMU/CMPA PRMP/FEIS which encompasses the WJMA.

8. *Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places:*
There are no features within the project area listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
9. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat.* There are no known threatened or endangered species or their habitat affected by the Proposed Action or alternatives.
10. *Whether an action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.* The Proposed Action and alternatives do not threaten to violate any law. The Proposed Action is in compliance with the CMPA RMP/ROD, which provides direction for the protection of the environment on public lands.

On the basis of the information contained in the EA and all other information available to me, it is my determination that: 1) The implementation of the Proposed Action or alternatives will not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in the AMU/CMPA PRMP/FEIS (2004); 2) The Proposed Action and alternatives are in conformance with the CMPA RMP/ROD (2005); 3) There would be no adverse societal or regional impacts and no adverse impacts to affected interests; and 4) The environmental effects, together with the proposed Project Design Features, against the tests of significance found at 40 CFR 1508.27 do not constitute a major Federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an EIS is not necessary and will not be prepared.

/signature on file/
Andrews/Steens Resource Area Field Manager

July 12, 2011
Date

**USDI, Bureau of Land Management
Andrews/Steens Resource Area, Burns District**

DECISION RECORD

Wildland Juniper Management Area Interpretive Trail

Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-OR-B060-2009-0078-EA

BACKGROUND

The Wildland Juniper Management Area (WJMA) Interpretive Trail Environmental Assessment (EA) analyzed issues emerging from the construction of an Interpretive Trail system that will be used to educate the public on juniper management.

The attached DOI-BLM-OR-B060-2009-0078-EA is tiered to the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area Resource Management Plan. The Proposed Action has been designed to conform to the following documents, which direct and provide the framework for management of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands within Burns District:

- The Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act (Steens Act) of 2000, Public Law 106-399 Pg. 4 Title V (2000)
- National Environmental Policy Act, 42 U.S.C. 4321-4347 (1970)
- Federal Land Policy and Management Act, 43 U.S.C. 1701 (1976)
- State, Local, and Tribal land use plans and regulation
- BLM National Sage-grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy (2004)
- Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon (Hagen - 2011)
- 1998 Burns District Noxious Weed Management Program EA (OR-020-98-05)

DECISION

Having considered the alternatives and associated impacts and based on analysis in DOI-BLM-OR-B060-2009-0078-EA, it is my decision to implement the Proposed Action with connecting trail (Alternative C).

In order to meet the education and interpretation elements expressed in the Steens Act, the BLM proposes a short network of interpretive trails including two to six informative panels and markers coinciding with a brochure and extension of existing pullouts. The trails would allow visitors a close view of juniper experimental treatments and their success in restoring native vegetation. Additionally, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) found the Proposed Action analyzed in DOI-BLM-OR-B060-2009-0078-EA did not constitute a major Federal action that would adversely impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement was unnecessary and will not be prepared.

The Proposed Action will be located approximately 72 miles south of Burns, Oregon, on Steens Mountain. The 3,267-acre WJMA was designated in the Steens Act for purposes of experimentation, education, interpretation, and demonstration of active and passive management intended to restore the historic fire regime and native vegetation communities on Steens Mountain [Sec. 501 (b)].

Various mechanical and prescribed fire treatments were established for six demonstration plots in the WJMA. Plots included cutting and piling, cutting and leaving, cutting and burning piles, prescribed burning, using explosive cords around trees, and no treatment. Implementation on the demonstration plots began in 2006 and work on the project is ongoing.

Signing, to date, includes six interpretive panels. Three are at the first pullout and three are at the study plots. Panels were installed in July 2009. A brochure is also under development and should be complete by summer 2012 in coordination with this proposal. Signs and a brochure are the result of an Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board grant.

The BLM is now proposing to build two trailheads and 1.2 miles of trails, extend existing pullouts, and install additional interpretive panels within the WJMA to provide visitors the opportunity to view juniper expansion and experimental treatments.

Design Features of the Proposed Action

Project Design Elements:

- Ensure equipment is washed and free of dirt, mud, and plant parts prior to arrival at the project location to minimize the potential for new weed introductions.
- Cultural sites would be surface collected by BLM staff annually to remove temptations to surface collect.
- The trail brochure or interpretative signs would also interpret the prehistoric sites along with the ecological themes predominant in the WJMA.

- Anti-looting signs would be installed at offsite locations on the trail in order to reinforce the notion that artifacts and sites should remain intact to both preserve their data potential but also to provide interest to the WJMA visitor.
- Work on the trail would not occur before July 15 to reduce disturbance to nesting birds and mule deer fawns.
- Drainage features will be installed on trail locations with slopes above 6 percent.

COMMENTS RECEIVED

A copy of the original EA and unsigned FONSI were mailed to Steens Mountain Advisory Council members, Oregon Natural Desert Association, Harney County, Burns Paiute Tribe, and Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board.

In addition, a notice was posted in the *Burns Times-Herald* newspaper on June 8, 2011.

The Burns District BLM has received no comments.

RATIONALE

The Proposed Action with connector trail will provide the best opportunity for an interpretive experience. This trail system will showcase the various treatments used in juniper management.

While visitors could access the area under the No Action Alternative there would not be any additional interpretive panels to explain the treatments and the functioning ecosystem. Also without a trail system to guide the visitor it is unlikely that many people would visit the interior of the WJMA.

In addition I have selected Alternative C based on the following Decision Factors:

1. Would the Proposed Action balance the proposed project's purpose and need with the BLM's other responsibilities to manage lands it administers?

Yes. This Interpretive Trail System will increase awareness with the juniper expansion and explain the BLM's management practices and decisions. As the BLM treats junipers across the District this educational trail will help educate the public in the management choices and the science behind the decisions.

2. Would the Proposed Action promote cost effectiveness?

The Proposed Action would promote cost effectiveness by utilizing cost share youth crews to build the trail under BLM supervision. The trail will be designed by BLM employees. Maintenance on this trail will be performed annually by the BLM.

APPEAL PROCEDURES

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with regulations contained in 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 4 and Form 1842-1. If an appeal is filed, your notice of appeal should be filed with the Andrews/Steens Resource Area Field Manager, Burns District Office, 28910 Highway 20 West, Hines, Oregon 97738, within 30 days following receipt of the final decision. The appellant has the burden of showing the decision appealed is in error. A copy of the appeal, statement of reasons, and all other supporting documents should also be sent to the Regional Solicitor, Pacific Northwest Region, U.S. Department of the Interior, 805 SW Broadway, Suite 600, Portland, Oregon 97205. If the notice of appeal did not include a statement of reasons for the appeal, it must be sent to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, 801 North Quincy Street, Arlington, Virginia 22203. It is suggested appeals be sent certified mail, return receipt requested.

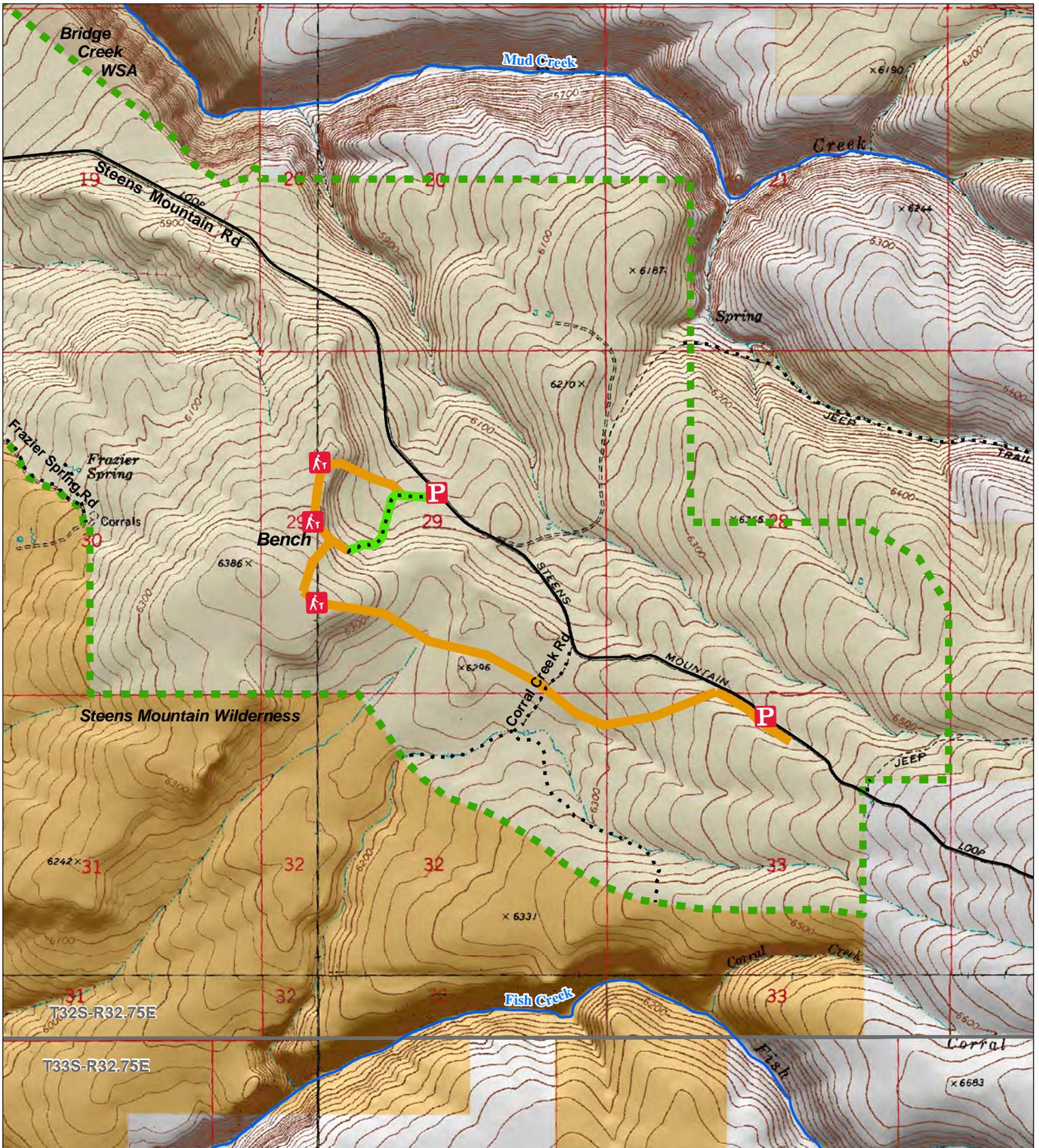
Request for Stay

Should you wish to file a motion for stay pending the outcome of an appeal of this decision, you must show sufficient justification based on the following standards under 43 CFR 4.21:

- The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.
- The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.
- The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted.
- Whether or not the public interest favors granting the stay.

/signature on file/
Joan M. Suther
Andrews/Steens Resource Area Field Manager

July 12, 2011
Date



Alternative C ~ Wildland Juniper Management Area Interpretive Trail

- Wildland Juniper Management Area
- Proposed Interpretive Panel (3)
- Proposed Expanded Parking Area (2)
- Proposed Trail Construction
- Proposed Road Converted to a Trail
- Non-Paved Improved Road
- Primitive Road Surface
- BLM Wilderness Study Area
- Steens Mtn Wilderness
- Bureau of Land Management
- Private Land

Disclaimer: The location of the trails are subject to change.

US DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
 Bureau of Land Management
 Burns District, Oregon
 Andrews Resource Area

Note: No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data was compiled from various sources and may be updated without notification.

B060-2009-0078-EA
 WJMATrail\AltC.mxd

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